

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

## LITURGY, CATECHESIS AND SACRAMENTS

Conversion to Christ is a lifelong process that should be accompanied at every stage by a vital catechesis that leads Christians on their journey towards holiness. Lifelong catechesis should take many forms and use a variety of means: participation in the Sunday Eucharist and study of the Liturgy, the study and exploration of Sacred Scripture and the social teachings of the Church, reflection on the important events of life in the light of Christian faith, opportunities for prayer, spiritual exercises, acts of charity that involve self-sacrifice, especially toward those in need, and more formal theological and catechetical instruction. Among these forms of continuing catechesis, the homily occupies a privileged position (NDC, pp. 117-118).

The Holy Spirit, at work in the Church, calls the community of believers to ongoing conversion and committed discipleship through prayer and action.

“Conversion to Christ involves making a genuine commitment to him and a personal decision to follow him as his disciple. Through this discipleship, the believer is united to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church” (NDC, p. 48). Since catechesis seeks to lead persons to a deeper relationship with Christ it is necessarily oriented to prayer and worship. “When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit” (GDC, 85).

In the mission of evangelization, catechesis and liturgy are intimately related. “Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity. Catechesis and Liturgy originate in the faith of the Church; they proclaim the Gospel; they call its hearers to conversion to Christ; they initiate believers into the life of Christ and his Church; and they look for the coming of the kingdom in its fullness...” (NDC, p. 110).

Liturgy celebrates what the church professes and lives. “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows” (SC, 10). “The liturgical life of the Church revolves around the sacraments, with the Eucharist at the center” (NDC, p. 113).

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It is the task of catechesis not only to prepare individuals and communities for an active and fruitful celebration of the liturgy, but also to reflect on the liturgy. Sacramental catechesis is not merely a one time introduction to the rubrics or the first reception of a sacrament, but sacramental catechesis is on-going and focuses on the deeper meaning of the words and actions, emphasizing how the liturgical signs reveal Christ's presence in the Church today. "The sacraments should be treated within the Paschal Mystery and presented as the means by which we share in the new life of Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments are not moments in human life of which God becomes a part, but rather the signs and reality of divine life of which we become a part" (Brom, 8-14-1997).

## **SACRAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

The National Directory for Catechesis gives several fundamental principles which apply to catechesis for all sacraments. The Directory states that sacramental catechesis:

- Is a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith, one that integrates knowledge of the faith with living the faith
- Is fundamentally Trinitarian and centers on initiation into the life of the Triune God
- Presents Christian life as a lifelong journey to the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit
- Is appropriate to the age level, maturity, and circumstances of those being catechized
- Is intended for all members of the Christian community, takes place within the community, and involves the whole community of faith
- Involves parents in the preparation of their children for the sacraments
- Is integrated into a comprehensive catechetical program
- Focuses primarily on the symbols, rituals, and prayers contained in the rite for each sacrament
- Enables the believer to reflect on the meaning of the sacrament received by implementing a thorough experience of *mystagogia* following the celebration (NDC, p. 114).

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In addition, the National Directory lists specific guidelines for each sacrament which parish leadership should incorporate into their catechesis on and preparation for each sacrament as follows:

- Sacraments of Initiation – pages 118-119.
- Catechesis for Baptism – pages 121-122.
- Catechesis for Confirmation – pages 122-123.
- Catechesis for Eucharist – pages 124-126.
- Catechesis for Children’s First Reception of the Eucharist – pages 127-128.
- Catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation – pages 132-134.
- Catechesis for Children’s First Reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation – pages 135-136.
- Catechesis for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick – pages 137-138.
- Catechesis for the Sacrament of Holy Orders – pages 140-141.
- Catechesis for the Sacrament of Matrimony – pages 143-145.

### **THE BAPTISMAL CATECHUMENATE**

As a result of the Second Vatican Council, the Church called for the restoration of the catechumenate - a process defined by several distinct steps, suitable instruction, and sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals (SC, 64). In 1988 the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* was approved and mandated for use in the dioceses of the United States by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Apostolic See (See RCIA, p. v).

The restoration of the catechumenal process has brought new life and vitality to the Church as those who wish to embark on the journey to embrace the Roman Catholic faith are supported and nourished by sponsors, godparents and the

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parish community. Recent Church documents have called the Baptismal Catechumenate the “inspiration” for all catechesis (see GDC, 90; OHWB, 26). The National Directory for Catechesis notes that the catechumenal process is a “fruitful blend of instruction and formation in the faith; it progresses through gradual stages; it unfolds the Church’s rites, symbols, and biblical and liturgical signs; and it incorporates the catechumens into the Christian community of faith and worship” (NDC, p. 116).

While catechesis, and more specifically sacramental preparation, should not rigidly follow the catechumenal process, the elements of journey, reflection on the Word of God, experience of symbols, celebration of the rites, incorporation into the community and life long catechesis should “inspire” all programming. “...[T]he baptismal catechumenate provides an admirable model for the whole of the Church’s catechetical efforts and especially emphasizes the necessity for lifelong catechesis” (NDC, p. 116).

## THE CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

The Christian Initiation of Adults is celebrated in Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The process of initiation following the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is considered normative for all persons being initiated into the Church and is inclusive of persons with special needs and persons from various cultural and/or ethnic groups. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults—Study Edition*, commonly referred to as the “white book” (includes the Rite, an outline of each rite, options, alternatives and the National Statutes for the Catechumenate) should be considered required reading and study for all leaders and teams working in the process of Christian Initiation for adults and/or children.

Diocesan Policy asserts that every parish should have in place the catechumenal process following the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. This

See  
Policy 410

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

process is to be used for all unbaptized persons (catechumens) and baptized Christians who are seeking full communion with the Catholic Church (candidates). It may be used for baptized, uncatechized Catholic adults preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist. Upon completion of the catechumenal process the catechumens (both children and adults) are fully initiated into the Roman Catholic Church and receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. The candidates receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil or any other appropriate time.

See  
Policy 411

### **THE CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF CHILDREN**

It is important to note that there is no separate Rite of Initiation for Children, but rather the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is adapted for Children (RCIA, Pt II). Children of catechetical age (both catechumens and candidates) must follow in the entire catechumenal process with adaptations to suit their age and level of understanding. In accord with Canon Law (CCL, 852.1, 97.2, 866), the National Statutes for the Catechumenate (See National Statute 18) and Diocesan Policy, when a child who has reached the age of reason (around seven years of age) is baptized, the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist are to be conferred within the same celebration. In other words, unbaptized children of catechetical age must receive all three sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil with the older catechumens. Likewise, when a child who was baptized in another faith tradition and has reached the age of reason is received into the Catholic Church, the sacrament of Confirmation is conferred prior to the reception of first Eucharist. In regard to Catholic children baptized as infants, but uncatechized, the Bishop reserves the right to confirm these children with their peers at age fifteen or sixteen.

See  
Policy 416

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

## THE PROCESS OF INITIATION

It is important to understand that Christian Initiation is not a program, but rather a process of conversion and discernment which should not be hurried. This process for the unbaptized includes four periods punctuated by three liturgical rites:

- The Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate is a period of no fixed amount of time. This is a time for inquiry, the introduction into Gospel values, the beginnings of faith and a sense of church. These informal gatherings should be available year round for those who are inquiring about the faith (See RCIA, 42; and National Statutes, 1).
- The Rite of Acceptance marks the beginning of the catechumenate. The person expresses their intention to respond to God’s call and follow the way of Christ, and the Church accepts their intention. This liturgical Rite may be celebrated more than once in a liturgical year when the readiness of inquirers demands.
- The Period of the Catechumenate should extend for at least one full year (National Statutes, 6 and Diocesan Policy). This is a time when the catechumen receives suitable catechesis which is gradual and complete; when he or she becomes familiar with the Christian way of life; when he or she is assisted on their journey with suitable liturgical rites; and when the catechumen learns to participate in the Church’s mission through witness and service. It is during this period that the catechumen is gently or “kindly” dismissed before the Liturgy of the Eucharist in order to “break open the Word” (See RCIA, 75). The catechumen is invited to feast at the table of the Word in anticipation of the day when he or she can feast at the Eucharistic table.

See  
Policy 412

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

- The Rite of Election formally ratifies the catechumen’s readiness for the sacraments of initiation. The catechumens, now the “elect,” express their desire to receive the sacraments of initiation and the Church accepts their election by God. In the Diocese of San Diego, adult catechumens should participate in the combined Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion, usually celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent. The Optional Rite for Children is celebrated in the parish.
- The Period of Purification and Enlightenment takes place during Lent. The focus of this period is on purification, balanced by emphasis on enlightenment. For the elect, this is a decisive time of final preparation and spiritual transformation preceding the celebration of initiation at the Easter Vigil. For the parish community, Lent is a time of ongoing formation and intense preparation for the renewal of baptismal promises at Easter. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the means by which this formation and preparation is accomplished. This period should not focus on systematic instruction in theology or Catholic practice. Rather, it should take on the character of a pre-baptism retreat, punctuated by the liturgical celebrations outlined in the Rite. Scrutinies, celebrated on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays in Lent, are meant to “heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect” (RCIA, 141) and to instruct them “gradually about the mystery of sin” (RCIA, 143). Since the elect are unbaptized, they do not receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the parish celebrations during Lent.
- The Rites of Initiation are normally integrated into the Easter Vigil and initiate the elect through Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
- The Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy is the time following the celebration of initiation in which the newly baptized or

See  
Policy 417

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

“neophyte” experiences what it means to be fully a part of the Christian community through ongoing catechesis and reflection on the Easter experience. The *National Statutes* suggest that this period extends until the anniversary of initiation with at least monthly gatherings (See *National Statutes*, 24).

In conformity with the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, modifications to the *Rite* are used with persons in particular circumstances: catechumens in exceptional cases (RCIA, Pt II, Ch. 2) and persons who have reached the age of reason, whether catechumens or not, who are in danger of death but are not at the point of death (RCIA, Pt. II, Ch 3).

The rites which are celebrated during the process of Initiation should be celebrated in the context of the Sunday assembly except where the actual *Rite* indicates otherwise. These rites include: the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, the Scrutinies, and the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation (usually integrated into the Easter Vigil). The Rite of Sending should be celebrated on a Sunday prior to or on the day of the Rite of Election, the Diocesan Liturgy celebrated with the Bishop.

## **RECEPTION OF BAPTIZED CHRISTIANS INTO FULL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

The Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into Full Communion of the Catholic Church is the “liturgical rite by which a person born and baptized in a separated ecclesial community is received, according to the Latin Rite, into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The rite is so arranged that no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity” (RCIA, 473).

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Persons who are baptized in another faith tradition should not be treated as catechumens. Their doctrinal and spiritual formation should be discerned on an individual basis. Formation for the baptized candidate should depend upon the “extent to which the baptized person has led a Christian life within a community of faith and been appropriately catechized to deepen his or her inner adherence to Church” (National Statutes, 30). While it may be necessary and appropriate for an individual candidate to participate in the elements of the catechumenal process, the person who is already baptized should not participate in the rites intended for the unbaptized. Candidates may participate in the Call to Continuing Conversion in a combined celebration with the Rite of Election normally celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent.

According to Diocesan Policy and the *National Statutes* (National Statutes, 33), it is preferable that the Reception into Full Communion be celebrated at a time other than the Easter Vigil. If, however, the combined Rites are celebrated at the Easter Vigil, a clear distinction should be made between those who are being baptized and those who are being received into full communion or completing initiation (See National Statutes, 34). The Reception into Full Communion may be celebrated more than once a year depending on the readiness of each candidate.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation for the adult or child candidate should be celebrated prior to (and separate from) the Rite of Reception into Full Communion. Adults who were baptized Catholic may be confirmed by the Pastor at the Easter Vigil.

If there is a reasonable doubt regarding the validity of the baptism of the candidate (e.g. whether the person was baptized with water or using the Trinitarian formula, etc.) and conditional baptism seems necessary, it should be celebrated privately rather than in the public assembly (see National Statutes, 37). Questions regarding the validity of baptism, should be referred to the Diocesan Tribunal.

The names of persons who have been received into Full Communion of the Catholic Church should be recorded in a special book, that is one different from other registers.

See  
Policy 419

See  
Guideline 28  
Conditional  
Baptism

See  
Guideline 29  
Register for  
Those Received  
into Full  
Communion

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

## ECUMENICAL SENSITIVITY

Bishop Brom has issued Guidelines for Ecumenical Sensitivity which should be followed by all those who work with candidates for Full Communion:

1. Only if, after serious investigation, there is doubt whether someone was baptized, or whether Baptism was conferred validly, should Baptism be administered conditionally.
2. In their initiation process, Candidates, that is those who have already been baptized, particularly those who exhibit some degree of Christian formation, should not be placed in the same classification as Catechumens, that is, those who have not been baptized. However, for pastoral reasons, candidates may benefit from the same sessions offered to the catechumens in the initiation process.
3. Candidates are invited to participate in the Liturgy of the Word and may choose to stay for the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, provided they do not receive Communion until they are fully initiated into the Roman Catholic Church. The choice to remain for the entire Mass belongs to the candidates. However, for pastoral reasons, pastors and catechists may wish to invite candidates, along with catechumens, to participate in dismissal after the Liturgy of the Word in order to continue breaking open the Word.
4. Candidates should not be referred to as “converts.” Only catechumens, after their Baptism, are considered to be converts to the Faith.

(Issued by Bishop Robert H. Brom, 6/2/1997)

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## **RESOLUTION OF PREVIOUS MARRIAGES**

In the initial interview with persons seeking initiation or full communion, their marital status needs to be addressed. If either they **or** their current spouse has been previously married, a formal annulment process may be necessary. Persons in these circumstances may be enrolled as a catechumen or candidate **only after** they have submitted their annulment petitions to the Tribunal. These persons **may not** participate in the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion (or the Sacraments of Initiation or Reception into Full Communion) until their and/or their spouse’s previous marital status has been resolved by the Tribunal. Depending on the situation of the persons involved, this may be a lengthy process and catechumens or candidates should not be given false hope or unrealistic promises of a quick resolution.

Once there is an affirmative decision (an annulment has been granted), if a marriage needs to be convalidated, the convalidation should be accomplished at a time prior to (and distinct from) the reception of the sacraments of initiation or reception into full communion.

See  
Policy 418

## **TEAM FORMATION FOR RCIA**

According to Diocesan Policy, it is the responsibility of the pastor to form a team to implement the RCIA process at the parish level. This team should reflect the diversity of the parish community and respond to special catechetical needs. The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry provides courses, workshops, inservices and consultation to assist in the catechetical formation of parish teams and the facilitation of the process of initiation. All RCIA catechists should be certified or in the process of obtaining California Catechist Certification and should follow Diocesan Policies for catechists. It is strongly recommended that those RCIA Coordinators or team members who are new to the RCIA process

See  
Policy 414

See  
Policy 230  
Policy 231

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

participate in the RCIA Specialization Course or a North American Forum on the Catechumenate Institute. RCIA Coordinators and catechists are encouraged to continue their formation by attending local/regional training opportunities.

### **PREPARATION OF PARENTS FOR THE BAPTISM OF THEIR CHILDREN**

The baptism of an infant brings a sense of joy and hope for the future to the entire faith community. In preparing parents and godparents for the baptism of an infant (a child who has not reached the age of reason), the Church shows its love and support for the parents as well as their children. According to Diocesan Policy, all parishes should prepare parents for the baptism of their child. The preparation gives the Church an opportunity to encourage parents in the formation of their child and provides parents and godparents with an opportunity to examine their own spirituality, their commitment to Christ and “to reexamine the meaning of the Christian message in their own lives” (NDC p. 120). The preparation process should also assist parents in assuming their role as primary catechists of the children (see CCL, 851.2).

See  
Policy 420

Catechesis for baptism is based on the Rite itself and helps parents in understanding the meaning of the sacrament and the obligations attached to it. This preparation time presents an evangelizing moment for parents who have been away from the Church or those who have not been married in the Church. Every effort should be made to ensure that the initial contact with the parish, the interview process and the baptismal preparation are occasions of welcome, invitation and hospitality for the parents and godparents.

See  
Policy 421

While the selection of two godparents is customary, only one (either male or female) is required. If two godparents are chosen, one should be male and one should be female (see CCL, 873). Godparents must be fully initiated Catholics (usually over the age of sixteen) who are living a life in harmony with the Catholic faith and should be encouraged to participate in the infant baptism preparation process if possible. A Christian, baptized in another faith tradition, may not serve

See  
Policy 423

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

as a godparent, but may serve as a witness along with the Catholic godparent and should be recorded accordingly (see CCL, 874.2).

See  
Policy 422

Infants should be baptized within a few weeks of birth; an infant in danger of death is to be baptized without delay (see CCL, 867.1 and 867.2). While it is not customary to refuse baptism, the sacrament may be delayed if there is not a founded hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic religion or “there is no assurance that the child’s faith will be nurtured” (NDC, p. 121). Parents should be advised of the reason for the delay (see CCL, 868.1 and 868.2) and “the parish should give attention to the families of these children through pastoral outreach and evangelization” (NDC, p. 121).

See  
Policy 424

Following baptism, it is the responsibility of the parents to raise the child in the faith and to ensure the child’s formal religious education. Parishes should remain in contact with the family and should provide opportunities to keep them connected to the larger faith community.

## **PREPARATION FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION AND FIRST EUCHARIST**

Preparation for first reception of Reconciliation and Eucharist involves several aspects including catechesis on the sacraments, in general, and preparation for the initial reception of a sacrament and ongoing deepening catechesis and formation, in particular.

See  
Policy 212

### First Reconciliation

Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances. Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child’s moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments

See  
Policy 213

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

(NDC, p. 135).

Foundational catechesis should be augmented in successive years. Persons with developmental disabilities may be admitted to the sacraments with catechesis and preparation adapted to their unique needs.

According to Diocesan Policy catechesis for First Reconciliation should be distinct and separate from catechesis for the reception of First Eucharist so that the identity of each sacrament is clear and so that the young person will feel ease with celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. “Readiness for reception of this sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness and conversion” (NDC, p. 135).

In the Diocese of San Diego, it is the norm that First Reconciliation is celebrated prior to the reception of First Eucharist. This Diocesan Policy is in accord with Canon Law (CCL, 914; See also CCC, 1457). The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be suited to the level of development of the young people. It is suggested that the celebration for children is separated from the parish adult celebration.

### First Eucharist

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Eucharist should help the young person with an understanding of God’s love, the importance of meal, their participation in the sacrifice of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Catechesis should teach children that “the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ, and what appear to be bread and wine are actually His living body” (NDC, p. 128) and should “help children participate actively and consciously in the Mass” (NDC, p. 127). The *Norms for the Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds* note that “children are encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds provided that they are properly instructed and that they are old enough to receive from the chalice” (Norms, 47).

See  
Policy 211

See  
Policy 211

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

There is no set length of time of preparation for the reception of Eucharist for the first time. The National Directory for Catechesis notes that

parents and the parish catechetical leader or catechist, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children have attained the age of reason and are ready to receive First Communion. Because reception of the Eucharist, especially for the first time, is integral to the child’s full incorporation into the ecclesial community, the pastor has a responsibility in determining every child’s readiness to receive First Communion. Parents also have the right and the duty to be involved in preparing their children for First Communion (NDC, p. 127).

See  
Policy 214

There is no set age or grade for reception of Eucharist by persons who are developmentally disabled. They may be admitted to the Eucharist if they have some understanding of the person of Jesus, are able to distinguish between Eucharist and ordinary bread and show a desire to receive the Eucharist.

Parent preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist often provides a unique opportunity to evangelize and deepen the faith of the parents. The catechesis offered to parents should help them grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist and should empower them to catechize their children more effectively. Parents should understand the importance of praying with their children and training them in the practice of faith. “Children, who participate with their family in the Mass, experience the Eucharistic mystery in an initial way and gradually learn to join with the liturgical assembly in prayer” (NDC, p. 126). “If children...take part in the Mass with their family...they will easily begin to sing and pray in the liturgical community and indeed will already have some initial idea of the Eucharistic Mystery” (DMC, 10). Diocesan Guidelines require parents to be prepared to assist in the catechesis of their children for the sacraments, but leave specification of number of sessions and length of sessions for parents to the discretion of the parish.

## CONFIRMATION

See  
Policies  
310-317

*“They recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35*

Catechesis for Confirmation should follow the pattern recommended for the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (see NDC, p. 122) and emphasizes that the sacrament perfects the grace of Baptism, imprinting an indelible character. Confirmation “strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit on those confirmed in order to incorporate them more firmly in Christ, strengthen their bond with the Church, associate them more closely with the Church’s mission, increase in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and help them bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds” (NDC, p. 123). Guidelines and supporting materials are available from the Office for Youth Ministry.

## **LITURGIES WITH CHILDREN**

Many catechetical programs include special liturgies for children, including Eucharistic liturgies. “Young children sometimes are not able to participate fully in Masses that are prepared primarily for adults since they may difficulty understanding the words, symbols, and actions of the Eucharist” (NDC, p. 129). In planning Eucharistic liturgies for children, the directives in the *Directory of Masses for Children* should be adhered to.

## **LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN**

In addition to systematic catechesis, many parishes provide a separate celebration of the liturgy of the word with children during the Sunday Liturgy. These celebrations promote active participation of children, and provide an opportunity for children to hear the readings proclaimed from the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, and personally reflect on what the Scriptures teach them about daily living.

See  
Guidelines 26  
[Liturgy of  
the Word  
with Children](#)